

Great Alaska Schools

2014 Candidate Questionnaire

20 Questions on Alaska Education Policy

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High Standards For Quality Alaska Schools

Background: Great Alaska Schools is committed to the achievement of high quality public education for every Alaska child. To reach this goal we believe Alaska must focus on specific outcomes, and set high standards for schools and teachers. One such set of standards has been established by the Anchorage United for Youth partners with their "90 by 2020" program. They specifically advocate tracking, among other things, whether Alaska children are ready for kindergarten, 3rd grade reading proficiency, 8th grade math proficiency, and high school graduation readiness as measures of educational success. More background information on their efforts can be found at: www.90by2020.org.

1. Do you support efforts like the 90 by 2020 partnership to establish education standards? Yes No

Please Explain

I believe that increasing graduation rates is a high priority.

2. Are there other measures that you would consider better indicators of school quality/performance? If so, what are they?

Like I mentioned above, I believe that an important indicator is the teacher-to-student ratio. I believe in making sure schools are adequately staffed so that teachers are able to focus on individual students. I also agree with the 90 by 2020 initiative, specifically that graduation rates and success after school are also important indicators, and I remain open to any other suggestions.

Assessment of Alaska's Public School System

3. Please describe what you consider to be one or two strengths (or successes) of Alaska's public school system statewide.

Despite adverse financial circumstances, schools have done well to hold steady or improve graduation rates. Also, Alaska schools continue to play an important steadying and social role in Alaska communities -- I see that every day in the schools of my district.

4. Please describe what you consider to be one or two weaknesses (or failures) of Alaska's public school system statewide.

I believe there is a lot of room for improve as far as incubating innovation in Alaska public education policy: I'm interested in exploring new ideas such as peer assistance and review, wrap-around services (e.g., Harlem Children's Zone) in schools with high-risk populations, Native language education, and (this may be the most important:) incentivizing the teaching profession

5. Please describe what you consider to be one or two strengths (or successes) of your local school district.

I am a hugely proud alumnus of the Sitka School District. It has great teachers. The school environment is safe and supportive. The school board is highly functioning -- among the best I've seen, really. The administration is strong. The Sitka School District is a terrific example of public education. I benefited greatly as a student as a human being.

6. Please describe what you consider to be one or two weaknesses (or failures) of your local school district.

I think there's room for improvement in cultural and Native language education (which SSD is actively working towards through the Wooncheen Preschool, in partnership with Sitka Tribe of Alaska -- which is a mega exciting enterprise, by the way). And I always think there's room for improvement in student achievement.

7. Please describe one or two actions that the Legislature might take that would address a weakness you identified above.

Adequate funding! (Do I sound like a broken record?) And innovation with public ed (see answer to question 4) is also an area for which I have a passion. I hope the legislature is proactive on the subject.

8. Do you believe decisions regarding education spending priorities (e.g., technology, school safety, Pre-K, classroom size, etc.) rest primarily with the Legislature or locally elected School Boards? Please Explain

Both. Of course, the question asks "primarily." From what I've observed, the legislature should retain the prerogative to find and define statewide education initiatives, but not at the expense of tying local districts' hands.

9. Which state expenditures (e.g., transportation infrastructure, energy infrastructure, public safety, gasoline, etc.) do you consider a higher priority than education funding?

All of these state priorities are important and interdependent. (Energy investments bring down the cost of public education, especially in rural districts, as I know from personal conversations with rural district staff.) And not all dollars towards transportation or energy are necessarily equal. In short, it's difficult to simplify.

Public Funds for Private Schools

10. Do you support placing a constitutional amendment on the ballot that would allow public funds to be used to fund students' education at private and religious schools? Yes No
(If yes, skip to Question 12)

11. If no, are there any restrictions or requirements that could be put into place that would change your position on Question 10? Yes No
Please Explain

Education Funding

Background: Between FY2011 and FY2014, the Base Student Allocation (BSA) was unchanged by the Legislature. Over that period, as a result of this inaction in the face of ordinary inflation, the BSA lost over \$400 in purchasing power. During the 2014 Legislative Session, Great Alaska Schools advocated for an increase in the BSA of \$400 in FY2015 and, as a temporary alternative to inflation-proofing the formula, scheduled increases of \$125 in the following two years.

The 2014 Legislature voted to increase the BSA by \$150 in FY15, \$50 in FY16, and \$50 in FY17. In addition, they appropriated funding "outside" the BSA (using the same distribution formula as the BSA) in an amount equivalent to a BSA increase of \$72 for FY15.

Assuming no funds are appropriated outside the BSA in FY16, the BSA would need to be increased by \$425 that year to return to the purchasing power of FY11.

12. Do you support the actions of the 2014 Legislature regarding the level of education funding provided? Yes No

13. Would you support an increase in the BSA of \$425 in FY16? Yes No
(if yes, skip to Question 16)

14. Would you support any increase in the BSA in FY16? Yes No
(if no, skip to Question 16)

15. What is the maximum increase in the BSA in FY16 that you would support?

16. Would you introduce a bill to effectuate your desired BSA increase? Yes No
17. If a majority of your caucus did not support the level of BSA increase you supported in your response to Questions 13 – 15, would you still vote to approve such a BSA increase (regardless of the consequences within your caucus)? Yes No
18. Do you support inflation-proofing the BSA amount going forward to provide durability and stable purchasing power for Alaska's education funding? (If yes, then skip to Question 20) Yes No
19. Do you support continuing the practice of scheduled increases to the BSA going forward at least three years to provide predictability to education funding? Yes No
20. Would you like to explain any of your answers to Questions 12 – 19? (Please indicate which answer you are explaining.)

Please use the space below to expand on any answers for which you need additional space. (Please indicate which answer you are expanding on.)